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 DE RUEHLD #1505 0211816
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 FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
 TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5823
 INFO RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 1287
 RUEHDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 7237
 BT
 C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 01505

EXDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM SENATOR PERCY

USUN FOR AMBASSADOR KIRKPATRICK

E.O. 12065: RDS-1 1/21/02 (STREATOR, E.J.) OR-M
 TAGS: PEPR, XF, SY, US
 SUBJECT: CODEL PERCY: VISIT TO DAMASCUS

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. BECAUSE OF THE PERSUASIVE ENCOURAGEMENT OF YOUR STATE DEPARTMENT COLLEAGUES, I DECIDED TO VISIT SYRIA AND SPENT JANUARY 19 IN DAMASCUS. I AM PLEASED THAT I DID. I HAD A THREE-HOUR MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM AND A TWO-HOUR SESSION WITH PRESIDENT ASSAD. I WAS CORDIALLY RECEIVED. THE CONVERSATIONS WERE WORTHWHILE AND CONFIRM MY BELIEF THAT WE SHOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO CARRY ON A HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE WITH THE SYRIANS WHO MUST BE PERSUADED TO TAKE AN ACTIVE

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ROLE IN THE PEACE PROCESS IF WE ARE TO ACHIEVE A COMPREHENSIVE MIDEAST SETTLEMENT THAT MEETS THE REQUIREMENTS OF ALL PARTIES.

3. I WAS NOT LOOKING FORWARD TO THE KHADDAM MEETING SINCE OUR LAST ENCOUNTER WAS UNPLEASANTLY POLEMICAL. HOWEVER, HE SEEMS TO HAVE MELLOWED, IN MANNER AT LEAST, OR WAS INSTRUCTED BY ASSAD TO "COOL IT". ALTHOUGH HE OUTLINED SYRIA'S FAMILIARLY HARD-LINE POSITIONS (CONFIRMING HOW FAR APART WE ARE), WE HAD A LIVELY EXCHANGE OF VIEWS AND HE WAS LISTENING AS WELL AS TALKING.

4. ASSAD AS USUAL WAS THOUGHTFUL AND CAREFUL IN HIS EXPOSITION OF SYRIA'S POLICY, BUT THERE WERE NO SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES WITH KHADDAM IN THE THRUST OF HIS REMARKS. IN BRIEF, AS YOU KNOW, SYRIA SEES THE ROAD TO MIDDLE EAST PEACE FROM A DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSITE POINT OF VIEW FROM THAT OF THE USG.

5. IN ANY EVENT, BOTH MEN SEEMED TO WISH TO CARRY ON A DIALOGUE WITH THE UNITED STATES. I MAY ALSO HAVE MADE SOME PROGRESS ON ENCOURAGING A CONSTRUCTIVE SYRIAN ROLE ON CERTAIN ASPECTS OF A SOLUTION FOR THE IRAQ-IRAN WAR. THAT AND OTHER DETAILS OF MY CONVERSATIONS ARE BEING SEPARATELY REPORTED. WE MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT, HOWEVER, THAT I DO NOT REALLY BELIEVE THEY PERCEIVE IT TO BE IN THEIR OWN BEST INTERESTS THAT THE WAR ENDS, AND MAY ONLY MOVE IN THIS DIRECTION IF THEY BELIEVE, AS I SAID, THEY WOULD GET GREAT CREDIT IN THE ARAB WORLD FOR PLAYING A MAJOR ROLE.

6. I HAD FEARED THAT KHADDAM AND ASSAD WOULD TRY TO DRAW ME INTO A DETAILED DEBATE ON THE GOLAN ISSUE IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL. ALTHOUGH THEY DID NOT, THEY DID MAKE IT ABUNDANTLY CLEAR TO ME HOW IMPORTANT THIS ISSUE IS TO SYRIA AND THE ENTIRE WORLD AND THEIR DEEP DISAPPOINTMENT WITH WHAT THEY CONSIDER THE INCONSISTENCY OF THE U.S. POSITION IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL NOW AS CONTRASTED TO OUR FULL SUPPORT FOR RESOLUTION 497 IN DECEMBER AND ALSO SUPPORT OF SANCTIONS AGAINST POLAND.

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7. WARM REGARDS. LOUIS

END OF MESSAGE

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